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Testimony on Wage Theft
In support of SB 1037, SB 914 and SB 106

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Representative Tercyak, Senator Gomes and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the wage theft that I have experienced. I recently worked at an elegant bar in downtown New Haven called 116 Crown. My weekly hours ranged from 65 hours to 100 hours, but I was never paid the overtime rate.

Working so many hours for nearly two years destroyed me physically and emotionally. I kept asking the boss to let me work less hours or to pay me the overtime rate. One day, when he tried to give me too much work, I said, "I need a day off and I won't come to work tomorrow." The next day, the boss's wife called me and asked why I wasn't working. Then she said that I should look for work elsewhere because they were not able to pay me the overtime.

Soon after that, I was overcome with anxiety and depression and I was hospitalized. I still take medication for anxiety, depression and insomnia. It's a result of so much unfair treatment, so many hours of work, and so little sleep.

I have lived and worked in the United States since 1989. This is not the first time that I have suffered wage theft.

From 2006 to 2012, I worked at a fiberglass factory called H&L Plastics located in North Haven and then New Haven. We manufactured fiberglass parts for trains, radio communications technology, snow mobiles and other things. At the beginning, H&L Plastics paid me overtime. I worked 40 hours and about 10 overtime hours on weekends.

Then, I began to have problems cashing my pay checks. Each week H&L Plastics would give us pay checks, although they knew that their checks had no funds. In total, I received 14 checks without funds.

At the end of 2012, six of those pay checks were still without funds, and I filed a lawsuit in federal court. Four or five other workers were afraid to join me, but eventually they joined the lawsuit too.

We were lucky to secure support from the community organization Unidad Latina en Accion and pro-bono legal representation by students at Yale Law School. Although there are tens of thousands of wage theft cases in Connecticut every year, Yale Law School only takes one case per semester.

The law students helped us investigate if the owner, Charles Bolton, had any assets, because if the employer does not have any assets, then the court can make a judgment but cannot guarantee he will pay.

It turned out that Mr. Bolton had sold the business for a ridiculously small amount of money.

We went to the federal court in Hartford to present evidence of the wages owed. The owner admitted that he did owe us those wages.

Then the owner broke down in tears and told the judge that he did not have the money. He said that his car was on loan, and the small money from the sale of his company had been used to pay his debts and buy new furniture and a new television for his house. However, the judge knew that Mr. Bolton was collecting a pension from his former company. The judge ordered him to use his pension money to pay us the minimum we were owed -- about \$6000 each -- in small installments.

Three years have gone by since my wages were stolen, and still I have not recovered all the wages. The owner pays us only \$100 per month, divided among 5 people. Is that justice? The laws are not working.

My former employers are free to continue exploiting people. I'm the one who has had problems with the police. When I tried to cash the pay checks, the check cashing agencies charged me fines, and one of the agencies sent the police to my house. I put the police on the phone with my employer to explain that I had not written fraudulent checks.

There is no justice for workers like me, and for that reason I support the legislative proposals to prevent wage theft and bring us justice. Thank you for listening to my testimony.